

Is There Ijmaa' That Taraweeh Is 20 Raka'at?

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[Q]: Some people insist that there is an ijmaa' (consensus) from the four well known Imaams - Aboo Haneefah, Maalik, ash Shaafi'ee and Ahmad Ibn Hanbal (rahimahumullaah), on praying only twenty rak'ahs for taraaweeh. Is this correct?

[A]: "This is an erroneous claim. This is what has been stated in the Hanafee books of fiqh (jurisprudence), for we do not find any book that can be authentically ascribed to Aboo Haneefah (d.150H) (rahimahullaah). Rather, what is apparent from looking into al-Muwatta of Imaam Muhammad (one of the main students of the Aboo Haneefah) is that Aboo Haneefah's madhhab (school of thought) was to pray eleven rak'ahs

Imaam Muhammad includes a chapter in al Muwatta (p.110), stating: "**Chapter: Establishing the Night Prayer in the month of Ramadhaan, and the virtues contained in it.**" Under this chapter he relates four ahaadeeth. The first, third and fourth narrations do not make mention of any specified number of rak'ahs for the Taraaweeh Prayer, rather they just mention the excellence of establishing Prayer in congregation and the excellence of the night Prayer in Ramadhaan. However, in the second narration eleven rak'ahs is mentioned. Then Imaam Muhammad said (p.111): "And we take all of this." ... Thus, he has shown that his madhhab is eleven rak'ahs, and this can only be the madhhab of Imaam Aboo Haneefah (rahmatullaahi 'alayhi) as well.

Ash-Shaafi'ee (d.204H) (rahimahullaah) said:

"There is no limit to its maximum number, since it is an optional Prayer. Thus, if the standing is lengthened, whilst the number of prostrations shortened (i.e. the number of rak'ahs are fewer), then that is good and that is what is most beloved to me. However, if the number of prostrations and bowings are increased (i.e. the number of rak'ahs are increased), then this is also good." ¹

So it is affirmed that Imaam ash Shaafi'ee (rahimahullaah) does not advocate restricting the number of rak'ahs to twenty. Rather, he gives preference for there to be fewer rak'ahs and an increase in the length of standing.

Imaam Ahmad Ibn Hanbal (d.241H) has approved of eleven rak'ahs as well as twenty - as Shaykhul-Islaam Ibn Taymiyyah says in al-Ikhtiyaaraatul-'Ilmiyyah (p.38) and Shaah Waliyyullaah says in al-Misriyyah (1/174) and al-Musaffaa (1/177).

Imaam Maalik (d.179H) (rahimahullaah) also supports eleven rak'ahs, as Shaykhul Islaam Ibn Taymiyyah mentioned in al Ikhtiyaraat (p.38) and as Jalaalud-Deen as-Suyootee mentions in al-Haawee lil Fataawaa (p.350), where he said: al-Jooree, one of our companions said, from Maalik who said: "That which 'Umar Ibnul-Khattaab gathered the people upon is more beloved to us, and that was eleven rak'ahs, and that was the prayer of Allaah's Messenger (sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam)." It was said to him: Eleven rak'abs with the Witr. So he said:

¹ Quoted by Ibn Nasr al-Marwazee in *Qiyaamul-Layl* (p.92).

Yes, and thirteen is close." Then he said: "I do not know from where they have introduced these numerous rukoo's (bowings)." ²

Praying eleven rak'ahs is based upon a number of authentic narrations, from them:

[1] What al-Bukhaaree relates in his Saheeh (no.2013) from Aboo Salamah Ibn 'Abdur-Rahmaan who relates that he asked 'Aa'ishah (radiyallaahu 'anhaa): How was the Prayer of the Prophet (sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam) in Ramadhaan? So she said: **"Allaah's Messenger (sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam) did not used to pray more than eleven rak'ahs during Ramadhaan or in other than Ramadhaan. He would pray four rak'ahs, and do not ask about their beauty and length. Then he would pray another four, and do not ask about their beauty and length. Then he would pray three (witr)."**

[2] Jaabir (radiyallaahu 'anhu) said: "Allaah's Messenger (sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam) led us in the month of Ramadhaan with eight rak'ahs and witr. Then on the following night we gathered in the mosque and hoped that he would come out, and we continued in that state until morning. Then we entered our houses, so we said: O Messenger of Allaah, we gathered in the mosque last night hoping that you would pray with us. So he said: "I feared that it would become prescribed (i.e. obligatory) for you." ³

[3] Imaam Maalik relates in his al-Muwatta (no. 248): From Muhammad Ibn Yoosuf, from as-Saa'ib Ibn Yazeed who said: "'Umar Ibnul-Khattaab ordered 'Ubayy Ibn Ka'b and Tameem ad-Daaree to lead the people in Prayer with eleven rak'abs. And the reciter would recite some hundreds of Verses until one of us would lean upon a stick because of the length of standing, and we had not used to finish until the appearance of Fajr." ⁴

[4] 'Ubayy Ibn Ka'b came to Allaah's Messenger (sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam) and said: O Messenger of Allaah, something happened with me last night - meaning in Ramadaan. So he said: And what was that 'Ubayy? He said: "Some women in my house said, we do not recite the Qur'aan, so can you lead us in Prayer? So I lead them in eight rak'ahs and prayed the witr." And this was a Sunnah of his approval, since he remained quiet and he did not say anything.⁵

So all this goes to show that insisting that there is a consensus on praying only twenty rak'ahs for taraaweesh - claiming this to be the only view of all the four well-known Imaams - is not only incorrect, but is against the established evidence. As regards a detailed discussion regarding the whole issue, then this is not possible here, nor is it the place to discuss the correctness, or merits, of praying twenty rak'ahs over eight, or vice-versa. Rather, one can find such discussions in the relevant chapters in the books of fiqh, whilst remembering that: "Difference in opinion must not be a source of obstinacy nor anger." ⁶

² *Tanqeedus-Sadeed bi Risaalati Ijtihaad wat-Taqlaad* (p.266-268) of Shaykh Badee'ud-Deen as-Sindee.

³ Related by Ibn Nasr (p.90) and others. Al-Haafidh Ibn Hajr indicated in *Fathul-Baaree* (3/10) that the narration is strong.

⁴ Shaykh al-Albaanee says in *Salaatut-Taraaweesh* (p.4)): "And its chain of narration is Saheeh *Jiddan* (extremely authentic)."

⁵ Hasan: Related by Ibn Nasr al-Marwazee (p.90). It was authenticated by Shaykh al-Albaanee in *Salaatut-Taraaweesh* (p.68).

⁶ From *Aadaahul-Khilaaf* (p.7) of Shaykh Saalih al Humaid.